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EMERGENT SPACES, CONTEMPORARY URBAN CONFLICTS: EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL MIX IN CHANGING NEIGHBORHOODS – THE CASE STUDY OF MILAN’S CHINATOWN

Lidia K. C. Manzo

ABSTRACT

Few of the spaces of Milan are so strongly loaded with cultural and political baggage as “Chinatown” – the ethnic neighborhood on Paolo Sarpi Street – where a handful of roads, the global flow of Chinese goods, and the daily routines of elderly people and families are merged. The complexity of the “Sarpi Question” is precisely determined by the discussion of social dimensions, space and ethnoracial, economic and political, all at once.

In order to come to a deeper understanding of the economic mechanism of development of a city, this chapter begins by examining the causes that led to the break of an apparent balance in the practices of local cohabitation of the Chinese District in Milan. This chapter will also

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examine the relationship of power and conflict between the local government and the social groups, from the point of view of an urban change process. This framework deals with reclaiming urban space and the requalification processes aimed at improving the physical context of the Sarpi area, and especially at starting up processes of financial revitalization.

“No buses, no taxis, no cars and no trading. Why don’t you just build a wall around us?” reads a banner displayed by traders on Sarpi Street in the 2008 Christmas season, the first month of controlled traffic flow. Ethnographic research attempts to explain how this result was reached.

The voice of Italian residents is only one of those emerging from the results of this research, along with those of business owners, city users, and local politicians. It is an interplay between antagonism and juxtaposition in which I have tried to highlight the existing conflict with the aim of understanding and explaining the tension in this urban space. Most importantly, this case demonstrates that the problem of cohabitation in a socially mixed neighborhood is a problem of representation and perception, which is essentially political.

The opening conclusions deal with the paradox of the urban safety policies promoted by the Milan local government as a place of decompression in the face of strong social pressure on immigration, precariousness, and insecurity. Strategies aimed at places to act on people.

INTRODUCTION

The 140,000 Chinese in Italy¹ are concentrated in Milan, Prato (a leather-working city near Florence), Rome, and in the surrounding area of Naples. Most of them came from Wenzhou in the eastern province of Zhejiang. The Chinese living in Milan have for some time now been regarded and described as a closed, silent, introverted, and isolated community. The area of reference with the most ethnic connotations in this sense is Via Paolo Sarpi, Milan’s Chinatown; it consists of a handful of streets where the global flow of Chinese goods and the daily routines of elderly people and families come together, but all of this has been impacted on by the arrival of wholesale trade in the 1990s. The balance is broken by a constant flow

of goods, vehicles, vans, trolleys, boxes, fumes, and rubbish. Chaos overwhelms via Sarpi, as well as the adjacent thoroughfares. Cohabitation is at risk, wedged between the business needs of the Chinese community and the daily habits of residents, that is, the Chinese work ethic based on breaking one's back for 16 hours a day, and the new zero tolerance Milanese outlook (Fig. 1). Beneath the surface intolerance, exasperation and exhaustion are all simmering. On both sides, Italians and Chinese have been living side by side now for 70 years without any conflict up to April 12, 2007, the first time ever that 300 Chinese reacted violently against measures imposed by the public authorities.

This chapter is part of an urban ethnographic research, which has been developed from an MA thesis in political and social communication at University of Milan, Italy. All the data have been collected from 2007 to 2009. They either derive from hundreds of hours of participant observations in the field, (the public and private spaces of Milan's Chinatown, i.e., Paolo Sarpi district), or from the qualitative interviews (31 altogether collected among: residents and traders, both Italian and Chinese, and local politicians), and a set of audio-visual data (photographs and movies taken by the author). See Manzo (2009) and the "Data and Method Appendix" for a more detailed description of field access and methodology.



Fig. 1. People on Paolo Sarpi Street. Source: Photo by Manfredi Marino.

MILAN, PAOLO SARPI STREET: AN ETHNIC NEIGHBORHOOD

The Chinese in Milan: Historical Arrival and Structural Characteristics

The official history of the Chinese arrival in Milan began in the late 1920s, when a small group of people, originating in a particular area of the coastal province of Zhejiang – in southern China – decided that the capital city of Lombardy would be a good place to “make a fortune.”²

The Chinese arrived in Italy around the 1920's ... they came from France, because they were those Chinese who had worked there and fought in the rear of the heavy industry infrastructure in support of the French-British army during the First World War. This was a one hundred and fifty thousand man contingent taken from the south-east China, in particular the regions of Zhejiang and Fujian. When their war experience in France ended ... many returned to China. Although many, unfortunately, lost their lives in France, but ... now it is often said that “the Chinese never died” but actually they did die! Anyway, a part of this contingent, a few hundred, I suppose, found no opportunities to be involved in French society, so they decided to emigrate from France to Italy. Mostly of these men have traveled all over Italy, walking through the Turin-Milan corridor; a few dozen of them stopped in Turin. Many, however, arrived in Milan and from there they have established ... I can say, they built the first Chinese community in Italy. (J.L. – 27 years old, second-generation Chinese in Italy)

In the years following World War I, the number of immigrants from that particular region of China continued to increase, and the inhabitants of the district Qingtian joined these immigrants (mostly related to them), coming from neighboring areas in Wenzhou-Ouhai, Wencheng, and Rui'an. Milan, in fact, seemed a relatively promising place, and throughout the course of the 1930s it became a popular destination for Chinese immigration into Europe.

Then the first stocks of the Chinese community who settled here in Milan ... expanded; it worked the mechanism of “relatives call relatives” so that from the areas from which came the first Chinese immigrants the flow continued ... in particular from the areas of Qingtian, Wenzhou Wencheng, which are the major cities of emigration in China. In fact as much as 75% of the Chinese population in Italy comes from the Zhejiang province. (J.L.)

Initially, the Chinese immigrants occupied jobs such as street vendors of trinkets, looking for new economic opportunities in Central and Eastern European countries, and in 10 years this Chinese group grew to consist of hundreds of people. This first “embryo” of the community settled near Paolo Sarpi Street, which at the time was still a neighborhood outside the

city center, as known to local Italian residents as “el bôrg di scigôlatt,” or the village of gardeners. The Sarpi neighborhood appeared to be a popular area at the beginning of last century; it was a place rich in shops, where living was cheap and where an increasing number of internal migrants were coming from other parts of northern and central Italy. Men and women come from the countryside to work there in Milan’s industries (Fig. 2).

After an initial period of selling necklaces and bracelets on the streets of Milan, some Chinese immigrants abandoned this unprofitable trade and joined the import trading from abroad – these kinds of cheap ornaments arrived mainly from France and Czechoslovakia – to start the in-house production and street selling of silk ties.

Many of these immigrants were industrial workers, and their educational levels were also pretty low ... so abroad they did the usual kind of jobs for migrants ... just the typical ones. For example, street vendors ... surely the Milanese remember the ties sellers along the sidewalks ... they also sold cheap jewelry and gift items. Among other things there are curious pictures of these characters that you can compare with, for instance, old photos of Italian immigrants. There is an equally significant photo of a Venetian man who emigrated to London and who was a grinder, and he was shown doing his job in the middle of the road at a kiosk where he would sharpen blades ... this was around 1924–1925. Meanwhile in Italy the immigrants were Chinese vendors of ties ... All in all, emigration is still the same, it doesn’t matter if you look from one side or the other. (J.L.)



Fig. 2. One of the First Chinese Pioneers in Milan. *Source:* Photo by Lidia K. C. Manzo.

With this first settlement into the economic fabric began the gradual development of the Chinese socioeconomic enclave³ in Milan. The same economic development occurred that during World War II would have colonized other niche economies, such as the production of leather goods and bags made by leather, canvas, and straw.⁴

For almost 30 years, the influx from China was small: reduced to a few hundred people from the area of Wenzhou who were able to pass through the border with Hong Kong and then flee to Europe. In the 1980s, China opened up to the world and the resumption of the massive influx significantly changed the composition of nuclei in some of the historical Chinese populations in Italy, including in Milan and Florence-Prato. After 30 years of isolation (from 1949 to 1979), the policy of reform and openness promoted by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s gave a powerful impetus back to the Chinese economy, and the country gradually reopened to foreign contacts.

There was an expansion of many businesses, which is mainly connected with the economic development of China and also with some subjective characteristics ... Chinese culture ... coming from Zhejiang ... whose people are highly motivated to do business, to make money ... as in Italy one could say "as a business from Brianza⁵ who is so good at making money" ... this is a kind of Chinese cultural equivalent. (J.L.)

The traditional Chinese family, especially in southern China, has often been compared to a corporate entity,⁶ in which individual resources are channeled collectively to ensure the prosperity and development of the entire clan. It is not a coincidence that the resumption of the migration flow during the 1980s coincided with the phase of major expansion of the three traditional areas of economic integration of the Chinese in Italy: in-house production or selling of leather goods, production of bags and other clothing items for Italian business, and catering. In the mid-1980s in Milan, there were only 500 Chinese residents, most of which had already reached an advanced stage in their migration process. For these people being able to rely on the work of their own relatives who arrived from China allowed them to solve the immediate problem of obtaining cheap labor, while at the same time enriching the family of a "new breed" to be exploited. In fact, each new arrival was considered an additional potential resource for the expansion of productive activities of the Chinese family clan. In any case, the migration was a privileged option, reserved for members of family clans who possessed relatives abroad and are able to shoulder the high costs of this venture. That explains why the emigration from Zhejiang has never become a widespread exodus: here it is not

desirable to call over “economic refugees” in the strict sense, but people who act on the behalf of family affairs, a collective strategy of social and economic expansion (Table 1).

During the 1990s, the initial Chinese pool of migrants from southern Zhejiang were supplemented by two new migratory flows: the one from the Sanming area – in the Fujian Province – and the other one originating in northern China, in particular from the largest industrial city of Shenyang (formerly known as Mukden, the ancient capital of Manchuria) in the Liaoning Province. Both of these new flows are linked to the development of smuggling organizations created and managed by the Zhejiang Chinese. The Chinese from Fujian in Milan are a small minority but they are increasing, and in other areas of Italy (particularly in Tuscany) they constitute a huge community.

Clandestine emigration of the northern Chinese provinces now allows even people from other areas of northern China to arrive in Europe and Italy. Within those who arrive are many women, often employed as nannies for well-to-do Italian families in Milan, who also interestingly teach the children of the migrants from southern Chinese provinces to speak “correct” Chinese, the Putonghua, or the official language of the PRC. Thus, the opening of a clandestine “corridor” is providing new opportunities to the Chinese women who are undocumented immigrants. Women from poor areas of northern China are also used in illegal activities such as street prostitution. The management of this turnover, according to testimony collected from Chinese immigrants, is developed predominantly

Table 1. Residency Permit Holders as of December 31, 2010 in Milan for the First Ten Nationalities.

	Total of Residents	Percentage
Philippines	33,745	15.5
Egypt	28,643	13.2
China	18,946	8.7
Peru	17,672	8.1
Ecuador	13,542	6.2
Sri Lanka Ceylon	13,340	6.1
Romania	12,154	5.6
Morocco	7,618	3.5
Ukraine	5,728	2.6
Albania	5,283	2.4

Source: Author’s elaboration on data provided by Servizio Statistica – Comune di Milano.

Note: Bold characters represents the Chinese population in Milan.

by Chinese gangs in the Northeast, acting with the complicity of other Chinese immigrants and Italian citizens (Cologna, 1998).

The Demographic Dimension

Most of today's Chinese population in the city of Milan has been a presence for several generations: two, in most cases, three, or even four in the case of the minority of the Lao Huaqiao, the "old Chinese citizens abroad" who settled in Italy in the period of 1920–1980. The main factors of dispersion into city territory were the expansion of the ethnic restaurant business together with the manufacturing of bags and clothes for other factories. Today, the Sarpi neighborhood is virtually closed to new arrivals: the buildings are sold or rented at incredibly high prices, and there is no space for any other kind of entrepreneurship that at one time had characterized the first integration of immigrants Chinese. "Chinatown is now the neighborhood showcase of those who 'made it'": it is the ideal place to open businesses and innovative, "ethnically dedicated," venues such as bars, taverns, and night clubs), and services activities (the headquarters of Chinese associations) (Cologna, 2002b). Of all the immigrant populations in Milan, the Chinese one is demographically the most balanced with respect to the male and female ratio. There are mostly young couples (25–44 years), which gradually expand their households giving birth to children – rarely less than two per family – and through family reunions (Fig. 3).

Through China maintaining a strong demand for migration, and the continuity of relatively favorable conditions for inclusion in Italy, this

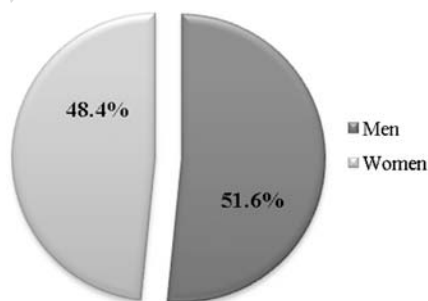


Fig. 3. The Chinese Community in Milan City. Residency Permit Holders by Gender as of December 31, 2010 ($N = 18,946$). Source: Author's elaboration on data provided by Servizio Statistica – Comune di Milano.

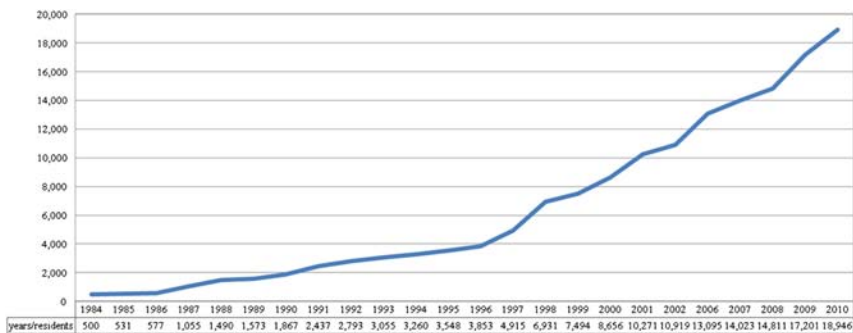


Fig. 4. Trend of Population Growth of the Chinese Community in Milan. Residency Permit Holders from 1984 to 2010. Source: Author's elaboration on data provided by Servizio Statistica – Comune di Milano.

complex intersection of family reunification, illegal immigration, and new births quickly generates high growth rates (Fig. 4).

In the short span of 10 years, 2000–2010, the Chinese immigrant population has more than doubled in Milan.⁷ It is a growth that does not yet know limits, and is looking forward to an increase of 30%. At the end of 2010, the municipal registers record 18,946 Chinese citizens in Milan, but the actual presence in the area is estimated in the realm of 23,000–25,000 people.⁸

The Socioeconomic Standing of Chinese in Milan

During the 1980s, the first Chinese migrants who were able to create their own businesses in empty economic spaces were also able to successfully establish a migration career. In effect, the emigration of those early pioneers is configured as through competitive personalities and family-based strategies. The ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Milan in those years had seen its finest hour: the restoration and the production for Italian factories were ideal spaces of economic expansion. At the same time, the circuitry of trust loans – the interest-free loans from relatives and friends – which was the basis of strategies in promoting economic and social development of Chinese immigrant families, allowed a large proportion of immigrants to start their own businesses within a few years.

Locked in kitchens and workshops, immigrants who arrived in Milan in the 1990s had little chance to learn anything about the language, customs, and norms of the host society; they were also no longer able to build support

networks aimed at opening up a path toward economic independence. Even managing a small family business of bags and clothes was configured no more as truly “self-employment” in the eyes of the Chinese because of the total dependence on Italian clients. This exclusion places the immigrant culture in conditions of extreme social weakness even with respect to its access to the owner market because of prohibitive prices of buildings in Milan. Giving an example of the complex Chinese socioeconomic enclave in Milan at the end of the 1990s, Cologna describes the placement of Chinese migrants in the different segments of the labor market: the primary one: *secure and steady work* (career track, officially qualified, with benefits), the secondary segment: *atypical and precarious work* (flexible, unstable, not necessarily with benefits), and the *illegal and undocumented sector* (jobs under the table) (2002b, p. 33). The degree of economic autonomy and the level of linguistic competence are the key variables of sociocultural integration of immigrants. The first defines the material conditions of development of the migration project, while the second depends substantially on the ability to understand the characteristics that structure the host society. By oversimplifying a very nuanced social reality, using these two variables of social integration is possible. In this way, Cologna divides the Chinese socioeconomic enclave of Milan into four distinct groups: the integrated (high linguistic competence/high economic autonomy), the ethnic entrepreneurs (low linguistic competence/high economic autonomy), the minors/youth educated in Italy (high linguistic competence/low economic autonomy), and the working class Chinese people (both low linguistic competence and economic autonomy) (2002b, p. 38).

The pool of Chinese immigrants in Milan has become a complex and socially stratified population, with segments who have very different levels of sociocultural integration and economic autonomy. Faced with a minority of businessmen who are well integrated into local production and very competent in terms of language and culture, the majority of ethnic businessmen who do not speak Italian has to deal with a prevalent cultural isolation.

EMERGING SPATIALITY AS A DIVIDING FIELD

The Urbanity of Milan's Chinatown

The proximity of the Sempione Park to the historical center of Milan and the fair zone, as well as post-war reconstruction, were the main causes that

led to the gentrification⁹ of the neighborhood where both lower and middle classes coexisted, and where now both Chinese immigrants and Milanese businessmen cohabit. The area, mostly inhabited by Chinese, is both residential and productive, and constitutes in this phase the “backstage” of the neighborhood; it runs through some secondary streets like Via Rosmini, Via Giordano Bruno, Via Giusti, and Via Aleardi, which are minor transit points where housing includes laboratories in courtyards and basements. In addition, markets, bag shops, and restaurants abound with the developing of Chinese import–export. Between the 1980s and the 1990s, Chinese visibility in the neighborhood increases. In addition to leather laboratories, markets, bag shops, and restaurants spread with the developing Chinese import–export. The neighborhood is increasingly marked by Chinese presence, and the Association of Chinese in Milan organizes feasts and shows, such as the traditional dragon parade for the Chinese New Year’s Day. In the mid-1990s, the business development increases in the Canonica-Sarpi area and its internal structure changes. The new law on trade simplifies the procedure to start new business activities, and this leads to the growth and stabilization of Chinese immigration in Milan, and this is also the cause, together with the crisis of small neighborhood shops, of the proliferation and diversification of Chinese trade activities.

The transformation of the Sarpi neighborhood from a residential and craftsmen’s area into an ethnic area, which is characterized by a socially and economically complex structure, is still an on-going process, which often leads to internal conflicts due to social status diversity and different social needs.¹⁰ (Novak, 2002, p. 24)

The elaboration of data that were collected on the field in February 2009, which regard the census of trade activities in the Sarpi neighborhood,¹¹ shows the increase in Chinese wholesale activities. This outcome is particularly remarkable when compared to other trade activities. Indeed, there is a balance between Chinese and Italian retail shops, while Italians prevail in the service industry.

As Cologne emphasizes in a previous survey,¹² this is an impressive datum,

undermining the traditional function of the Sarpi neighborhood for Chinese in Milan, once predominantly an area of services, a place for socialization and as well as a place of “symbolic domiciliation” for Chinese identity in the regional context. A great part of the customers in this area is not Chinese: they are Italians, Bangladeshi, Moroccans, and other hawkers or retailers of different nationalities, even foreigners such as French, Swiss, and Germans. (Cologne, 2008, pp. 10–11)

Table 2. Trade Activities in the Sarpi Neighborhood (February 2009).

	Wholesale	Retail	Services
Italian	0	49.5	59.5
Chinese	100	50.5	40.5
Total	100	100	100

Source: Author’s elaboration on data collected by Lidia K. C. Manzo.
Percentage value ($N = 722$).

As we can see in Table 2, wholesale companies comprise 45.6% of the total amount of Chinese businesses in the Sarpi neighborhood. But the space “offered” by this territory is very narrow and equally affected by a road choked by traffic conditions caused by both private and public transportation¹³ (Table 3).

Historically, Bramante Street had never attracted many companies to open businesses because of its unfortunate characteristics of poor passage and visibility, being so pressed between the tram tracks and a narrow two-way street with small sidewalks. Yet the first Chinese wholesalers decided to invest in the 1990s here and in other internal streets in the same neighborhood. Because of the intrinsic characteristics of wholesale trade, these businessmen were more interested in obtaining a strategic position near the expansive and important Paolo Sarpi Street – the hub for retail and service business for the Chinese community in Milan – in a location with lower commercial value rather than having beautiful windows exposure, as is the case on larger avenues. This brief history highlights on one hand the extreme “determination” of the Chinese business system, and on the other it points out how the commercial frame of this urban space would be heavily transformed. In Table 4, the streets with the highest concentration of Chinese wholesale stores in 2009 are presented. As we explained, the first position is taken by Bramante Street, which totaled 48% of wholesales companies in the neighborhood.

By making a comparison between the data I collected in 2009 and other research conducted by the research institute Agenzia Codici in 2007, we note that the wholesale phenomenon is taking a negative turn. The neighborhood is affected by a huge process of metamorphosis, triggered by the very high concentration of Chinese wholesale companies. Over the years, these businesses have created problems of traffic due to the loading and the unloading of goods, and problems of the cohabitation with the Italian residents (estimated at 90–95% of the total residence).¹⁴

Table 3. Trade Activities with Chinese Owners in the Sarpi Neighborhood (A Comparison of Two Surveys Developed on October 2007 and February 2009).

	February 2009	October 2007	Difference
Wholesale	45.6	58.7	-13.1
Retail	34.8	23.0	+11.8
Services	19.6	18.3	+1.3
Total	100	100	

Source: Author's elaboration on data collected by Lidia K. C. Manzo.
Percentage value (for the year 2009, $N=443$).

Table 4. Wholesale Activities Managed by Chinese Companies (An Overview of the Greatest Concentration in the Streets of Sarpi Neighborhood in 2009).

via Bramante	48.0
via Niccolini	10.4
via Giusti	8.9
via G. Bruno	7.4
via Rosmini	7.4
via Montello	7.4
via Sarpi	2.9
via Messina	2.5
Other streets	5.1
Total	100

Source: Author's elaboration on data collected by Lidia K. C. Manzo.
Percentage value ($N=202$).

Cologna, too, in the analysis of the survey dated October 2007, emphasizes the conversion of wholesale trade in Sarpi, explaining that

there are more and more Chinese entrepreneurs who are choosing to convert their wholesale activities in a retail space or to re-locate their business away (in fact, many Milanese wholesalers are being "displaced" by their own, moving for example in the context of Prato, where a new Chinese wholesale hub is developing). (Cologna, 2008, p. 10)

Of course we cannot analyze this countertrend of the wholesale trade in Sarpi using a deterministic explanation. Among the possible motives, we have to consider a more general crisis surrounding the global economic system after the collapse of stock markets in autumn 2008 and daily

difficulties of maintaining profit margins against more ruthless business competition. With a changing perspective of business in the neighborhood and alongside such confirmations of wholesale and retail trading of clothing, jewelry, and accessories, there are new entries like telephone and computer stores and hairdressers. If the first ones are aimed primarily at people in Milan who use Chinese technologies, that is, computers, cell phones, software and operating systems specifically for the Chinese language,¹⁵ the second ones address a more general kind of customers who seek an inexpensive service.

Experiences of Social Mix in a Changing Neighborhood

The Sarpi neighborhood is decreasingly productive because of high rent prices, unavailability of spaces, growing intolerance of the residents, and increasing controls on Chinese trade as well as on road conditions. According to Novak (2002), the neighborhood is rapidly evolving toward something more visible and deep-rooted as well as more stable and complex. It is not a mere place of residence, but a growing place of financial and service exchanges, trade, and both national and international relationships. Moreover, the neighborhood is characterized by the “dynamics of village,” with relationships among neighbors, trade, meetings, and sharing; at the same time, it is characterized by the “dynamics of global relations,” such as the international exchange of goods, information, capital, and persons (Fig. 5).

Actually, Milan is not a complete “handiwork,” neither a territory, but a complex and organized center of influence. It is a worldwide known important brand, composed of different territories and physical realities, of operators and enterprises, and of coming, residing, and going populations, which feel Milanese in their global operations, even though officially they do not reside in the territory of Milan municipality (Torrani, 2006). Via Paolo Sarpi shows spread of micro-transformations, which, after a certain threshold, create processes of metamorphosis, and role and sense transformations of entire urban populations (Lanzani, 2003).

Currently, the Sarpi neighborhood features a great number of wholesale businesses. Over the years these have generated a range of traffic problems mainly linked to the unloading of goods, as well as issues pertaining to the cohabitation with the local Italian population (an estimated 90–95%).¹⁶ Therefore, as of November 17, 2008, the Municipal Authority of Milan established a limited access zone (Zona a Traffico Limitato, ZTL). As a

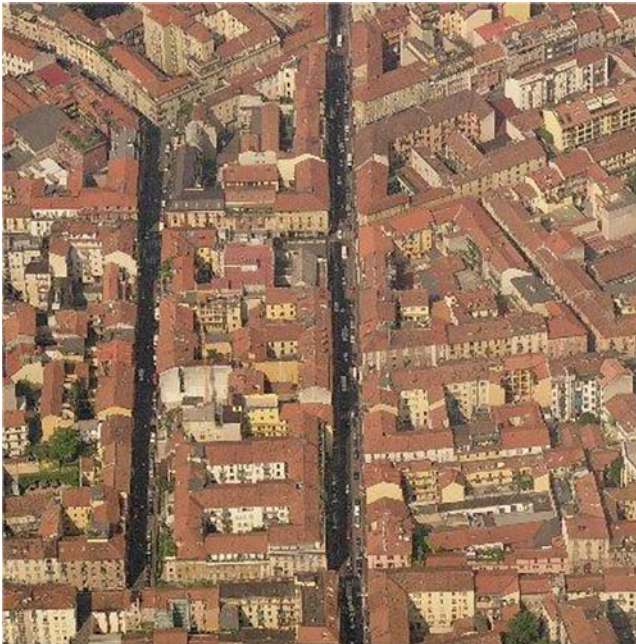


Fig. 5. Paolo Sarpi Street, a View. *Source:* Image elaborated by the author from the free cartography access at municipality of website.

result only residents are allowed access and transit, though taxis and motorcycles are exempt from exclusion. So as to enforce such provisions, the local authorities have erected a network of CCTV cameras to monitor traffic. This process of urban transformation was politically interpreted as an attempt to eradicate Chinese wholesalers from the district.

We have taken these steps because we are convinced and we hope the Chinese will start to emigrate. (Riccardo De Corato, Deputy Mayor of Milan and security councilor)

No buses, no taxis, no cars and no trading. Why don't you just build a wall around us?, reads a banner displayed by traders in the 2008 Christmas season, the first month of controlled traffic flow. Ethnographic research attempts to explain how this result was reached.

As Gottdiener and Hutchinson remark, despite the old saying “You can’t fight city hall,” “many people do just that” (2006, p. 241). According to Castells (1983), urban social movements are usually directed *against city hall*. The target of this movement was, again, the local Milanese

government. The Sarpi “question” is made up of a range of contrasting voices, each witnessing constantly clashing interests. As we prepare to represent the conflict via Sarpi setting, we need to make a small detour, introducing a temporary change of scene: from the Chinese community to the Vice-Mayor and from an ethnically diverse neighborhood to the heart of the Municipal Government of Milan. Vice-Mayor De Corato immediately makes me aware of his rhetorical dimension. His approach is an alarmist one. He states that the true issue of Europe and of the entire Western world is the Chinese one. Not Romanians or Arabs, but the Chinese – as there are so many: one and a half billion.

There are many who arrive, who knows from where (?) ... unless they arrive in the containers with the goods, and they bring over all kind of counterfeit stuff from China ... not one original piece. Everything they sell is fake. (Riccardo De Corato)

However, this is clearly not only about a quantitative presence here but also about the impact of the Chinese commercial and entrepreneurial system on the area.

Every day I work with 150 ethnic groups that are present in our city. The one I am most concerned about are the Chinese because they work hard. The others, some are idlers and a few are like us Europeans ... the Arabs, there are like 80,000 Muslims ... but still, can be managed.

But with the Chinese you can't do anything ... I even know some of them and I respect them. I think to myself: “shit ... these people work hard. What can you do to them?” (Riccardo De Corato)

Now real political concern for the Chinese phenomenon is born. Countermeasures are sought but not identified, and in order to face an uncertain economic future, an appeal is made to the European institutions to see whether dumping against China is an option for the protection of the domestic market. Hairdressers present a clear example: Chinese salons will set your hair for €8 or even €6! This clearly has an impact on Italian establishments, as he described here with some worry:

In this way they destroy the Italian economy. They will soon be able to clone us and then sell us for half of the price, do you know what I mean? (Riccardo De Corato)

The Vice-Mayor's vision contrasts with that of the via Sarpi traders, fighting through Associazione Liberi Esercenti Sarpi (ALES) associations to return the commercial interest of the past to the area. From an economical point of view, there are Chinese dealers who have the possibility of selling articles at really competitive prices, where in other areas of Milan the same products are sold for a price three times higher. As Walter the butcher says:

In the past, on Sarpi Street there were 12 butcher shops and each one of us was trying to do his best differentiating quality, product and price. We are not interested in through away Chinese shops: everyone is free to do as they wish! However, this presence makes our street more commercially appealing, and it is a road that can be a real economic market. (Walter, butcher on Paolo Sarpi Street)

Contemporary Urban Conflicts: “Stay Away From Sarpi Street or Fight Against City Hall!”

According to Antonella Ceccagno, “one thing that must certainly be highlighted is that it is difficult to imagine any interest of the Chinese community as completely separate from those of the Italian one.”¹⁷ But the “Italian question” is extremely complex. If we are to speak of Italians, we shall have to distinguish at least three main interest groups feeding the same number of local trends: residents, traders, and those who use the area and the services it provides. In 2005, the *Vivisarpi* Association was founded by the neighborhood committee established 6 years earlier. To date the organization has 150 members. I was given the chance to speak to its President, Pier Franco, a smart middle-aged man at the helm of this independent front against Chinese wholesale trade. Everything began with the first Chinese wholesaler settlements in Bramante Street. That street already had problems, as the tram rails didn’t allow for parking there. There were some shops that had been shut for a while and some deposits. In 1999, the Chinese suddenly bought all the shops and changed them into wholesale warehouses (Fig. 6). The general picture is always that of alarm and restlessness,

in that period, big trucks stopped right in the middle of the road every day to unload goods. These unclear signs of change created a situation of alert in the district and that’s when people got together. A 600-people assembly took place, in which the Mayor Moratti took part, together with Mr. De Corato and the Municipal Police chief, Mr. Bezzon. It lasted from 9.00 pm until 12.30 a.m. During that time frustration exasperation and anger were expressed towards the situation and against the municipality. (Pier Franco, President of *Vivisarpi* Association, fight for the resident rights)

But the main backbone of the Chinese diaspora in Milan is certainly work, and more specifically entrepreneurial and freelance work aimed at a high level of financial gain. Overlooking this would mean to seriously misunderstand the meaning of the Chinese migration experience. The daily life of a Chinese family is truly imbued by the goal of working and earning, and reaching the independence that owning a business may bring. These values are the basis of the complex ethnic economies behind Chinese diaspora in the west, and this includes Milan (Breveglieri & Lanzani,



Fig. 6. A Protest March of the Italian Residents Against the Local Policies. Sarpi Street, December 1, 2007. Source: <http://www.vivisarpi.it>.

1997). Chinese entrepreneurs have slowly replaced the artisan craft shops, which, partly due to changing markets and partly due to the loss of the father-to-son transmission of skills, were closing down fast. So cobblers, upholsterers, furniture makers, restorers, frame makers, barbers, and so on have given up their spaces and often their licenses too. After this, the Chinese realized that this new settlement area was not ideal: roads were narrow, parking spaces difficult to come by, and this along with other limits imposed by the municipal administration made trade increasingly difficult. The discourse that in a sense blew up last year is connected to exactly this: the fact that all of the Chinese wholesalers started to get fined. Therefore, Chinese traders began to feel persecuted, and Jianyi also (a member of Associna)¹⁸ confirms that:

These series of fines and prohibitions came from one day to the next and all of the Chinese businessmen found themselves facing difficulties that didn't use to be there at the start. (Jianyi, member of Associna)

The notion of “thresholds of tolerance,” one largely evoked in similar situations, here too reveals its ideological and prejudicial features. Responding exclusively to issues of public safety and subservience, and to attempt to hide migration phenomena, it proves ineffective at managing the range of social, economic and town planning meanings that any territorial

concentration process entails. The revolt of 2007 is a result of this unease, linked to the fact that sanctions were continually imposed precisely on all those actions and activities that Chinese wholesale trade required.

Italian dealers, for example ... the ones that load and unload dairy products were completely ignored by the police even if they used hand-carts to go around while the Chinese were systematically blocked, and fined. When ethnic factors come into play with commercial interests, the risk that is created is very dangerous ... explosive! (Jianyi)

Moreover, the neighborhood doesn't have any public areas. It is mainly made up of densely packed roads and the only real large public area is Paolo Sarpi Street, which has always been a commercial street of the district and a historical meeting point. In addition, when you speak about Chinatown, the large districts of Chinese settlement come to mind, where all the shops, the residents, and people on the streets are Chinese. Instead, in Paolo Sarpi Street, the 95% of the resident population are Italian, with the minority being Chinese:

The separation between the ground floor and the highest floors is what creates the real problem of cohabitation. The first one is almost completely Chinese, in terms of use and attendance and the second one is almost completely Italian. (Christian Novak, town planner, Professor at the University "Politecnico di Milano")

This wouldn't have occurred if our Chinatown had been put together as the ones in the states, where most of the residents are Chinese, as well as the traders and the visitors of the area. The third antagonist between the needs of residents and the public authority's policies is the trader's group. Here too, the situation is far from simple. More than 180 traders are represented by ALES, where more than half are Chinese:

For the ALES association we are all traders, and we don't make a difference. We are all traders, all working families, on different levels and with different mentalities ... we certainly don't want to create differences. For me, a person who works is a person to be respected ... So, today trading is forbidden, why? Because of "our esteemed residents" who want to walk around in the Street. We are not in agreement with this, and we find it absurd and unacceptable for the future of a Milan in the 2015 Expo. (Walter)

The rationale behind the idea of pedestrianizing is twofold: firstly, it aims at reclaiming street furniture, and secondly, at reducing the use of the district as a logistics platform for Chinese wholesalers. This is how the councilor begins to describe the problem. He welcomes me into his office at the *Urban Center*, housed within the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele where the Department for the Renewal of the city of Milan is located.

From the rarefied heights of the town planning chair, here is Masseroli's Sarpi plan:

So we have a neighborhood that has been transformed in a span of fifteen years from that of one of the most attractive commercial streets in the city to one of the most chaotic in the city; completely out of control from city organizational point of view. (Carlo Masseroli, Assessor, town councilor in urban policy)

The councilor knows that he cannot count on legislation to pursue his cuts on wholesale activities in such a dense area. Therefore, he has resorted to "a kind of scheme consisting of a range of measures to improve conditions in the neighborhood," as he puts it. The opinion of Vice-Mayor De Corato is even more bluntly articulated, as he explains that his council has decided for traffic closure via Sarpi with the belief that the Chinese will begin to emigrate as "they can't stay there." And he adds to this that:

Now, Paolo Sarpi Street is a pedestrian area (and they [the traders] didn't understand this small footway ... It's not that they didn't understand, because if you and I understood it means that they also understood ... because we are not that ...). What is the declared purpose of the pedestrian area? It is to make the Chinese wholesale activities go away. Why did we do it? Not because we wanted to increase the air quality in Paolo Sarpi Street but because we want to get rid of these Chinese. If they don't understand this, what are we supposed to do? (Riccardo De Corato)

Naturally, the traders have understood this step as well and are all the more vexed. They say they will do their very worst and shall protest against these measures. Retailers especially, both Italian and Chinese, speak about a real blow due to the difficulties encountered by clients following the traffic ban for nonresidents. ALES, the traders' association, is basically talking about an abuse of power on the part of the Milan municipality. Remo, the President of ALES, is very clear about it:

The city got mad with us (the traders) although we have nothing to do with the wholesale. As you know, we started to consider this problem and to listen to everyone before anything else. They forced us to say, "prohibition of vehicles circulation or pedestrianization?" At this point I was shocked. (Remo, President of the dealer Association "ALES")

In conclusion, we could say that the local communities associations were capable of showing the ambiguous nature of the Milan city government, probably driven from the "élite" developers' interests. In any case, these social movements constituted a form of politics, ready to fight for their everyday neighborhood practices (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Protest Murals on Sarpi Wall: Look at the Claim “Rivolta Ovunque” (Riot Everywhere), at the Hand Without the Thumb, and at the Chinese With a Work Cart, April 2011. *Source:* Photo by Lidia K. C. Manzo.

Toward the Gentrification of Milan's Chinatown

There is a great buzz around the Sarpi neighborhood in the context of the outlook regarding the next 2015 Expo Fair. Many initiatives are being considered, and these are aimed at transforming and giving value to the surrounding area in the direction of Fiera City.¹⁹ This certainly is whetting the appetite of both residents, who would see an increase in the value of their homes, and speculators always have their ear to the ground too. The urban crisis also arose because of a lack of clarity with respect to the future: unless the dynamics engendering a change of skin and soul in these neighborhoods becomes clear, “those against the changes will easily be able to identify scapegoats. And those espousing the change are prone to forgetting – and making others forget – the responsibilities such a potentially huge change brings” (Inti, 2006, p. 157). Furthermore, the effect of new selection dynamics different to trade ones (no to wholesale and yes to retail), in the face of new elite residents promoted by the political and economic system, will certainly create a new interpretation of these spaces.

The reflections on urban commerce in the Sarpi neighborhood interweaves with the starting up processes of a financial renaissance. In short, a gentrification of the neighborhood is sought.

During this process the district has lost its working class connotation. This is one of the problems connected to Chinese and Italian cohabitation. Gentrification is not the only thing with a hard aspect because here in Italy and not in the USA, it affects properties. Here, people who bought their houses in the 80s and 90s made a strong investment, spent a lot of money and so are very determined in preserving their investments. That's why they fight hard against everything that could decrease their investment value or lower their quality of life. (Christian Novak)

Councilor Masseroli does not appear to be shocked by possible future gentrification scenarios:

Yes, if you want we can talk about gentrification with the Chinese community, however it was something inertial. I mean, the local government aims to provide incentives and create pathways.

We want the creative and young people of Milan.

I say that the real challenge for a city is to be able to offer strong attractive conditions. (Carlo Masseroli)

Thus, the gentrification would be configured as a young, upper-middle-class university-educated population who may choose to dwell in a neighborhood of a recent ethnic past that is now looking onto new opportunities given by the pedestrian area, such as the "movida" (nightlife-centric) of the Milanese clubs has already been evident in the closing by Garibaldi-Brera area, all shrouded in a halo of emerging cosmopolitan promise.

A pedestrian island characterized by stone pavements, benches ... But the residents also expect something else. They expect paths, planted trees, green areas and, above all, tranquility, silence and something that is much more similar to project-rendering than to reality. Not only it that. It could become, with time, a place where you could re-establish nightlife, which today is quite weak. And if we think about what pedestrian islands have become in the Navigli area in just few months, and what cohabitation problems these create, this is for sure one of the things that residents don't expect and would never want from the pedestrianization. (Christian Novak)

An interesting comparison is made when we look at the problems emerging in districts where nightlife is lived out by some, and the needs of residents weigh on the other part of the equation: the former are a different tribe, arriving in the evening just to have fun, and have no interest in the abuse or at least intensive use of public space. They are not mindful of soiling or being noisy, and they are not concerned with a space they do not consider theirs, exactly because they do not live there and cannot see the spectacle of abandoned beer bottles at dawn! Another idea is to create a more picturesque commercial district that incorporates the characteristics of the neighborhood, with specific shops, like the "Cappelleria Melegari,"²⁰ or other shops that existed before but also

are innovative, mixing a bit with some quality ethnic trade. As Zukin (1989) emphasizes, using preservation rather than new construction constitutes an alternative strategy for the revalorization of the historic heritage of a district. In her recent book, *Naked City*, Zukin focuses attention on “a gentrifier’s aesthetic appreciation of urban authenticity” (2010, p. 18), but regarding the power of banks and real estate companies, “the importance of capital in the broadest sense”: the economic, social as well as the “cultural capital of gentrifiers (...) who find their subjective identity in this particular image of urban authenticity” (Zukin, 2010, p. 18).

“What happens now, she said, is powerful and breathtakingly fast – a product of upper-middle-class aesthetics, and newspapers, magazines and blogs that compete to find new destination neighborhoods”²¹ (Fig. 8).

The voice of Vice-Mayor De Corato even echoes the ancient artisan vocation of Paolo Sarpi:

So, retail traders, retail craft I believe being the best vocation for Paolo Sarpi Street. Some residence, the same ones, otherwise ... It needs to go back to what it was during the *Borgh di Scigolatt*, when retail craft prevailed, and I’m not talking about furniture crafts, I’m talking about craftsmanship. There is a vocation on that street, but the



Fig. 8. The Pedestrianization Process in Paolo Sarpi Street, April 2011.

Source: Photo by Lidia K. C. Manzo.

problem is the Chinese: if we don't send a few away where are the craftsmen supposed to go? (Riccardo De Corato)

The game is still well underway.

DISPLACEMENT, IMMIGRATION, AND THE ROLE THAT LOCAL POLITICS PLAY IN SHAPING URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS

The Displacement of Chinese Wholesalers from Sarpi Neighborhood

Starting at the end of 2007, many Chinese entrepreneurs choose to convert their business into a retail business, which began a process of conversion of the wholesale spaces on Sarpi Street. Some Chinese wholesalers from Milan and from other parts of Italy decided to relocate the trading to the “Center for International Trade Il Girasole” in Lachiarella, a small logistics site located in the southern suburbs of Milan. The name of this platform that brings together 100 Chinese companies for the 70% who comes not only from the Sarpi neighborhood but also from other cities like Prato, Naples, and Turin is called “Ingrosso 1.”

Marco, Chinese owner of “Amici” store in Sarpi Street, confirms that he is one of the many Chinese wholesalers who have left the Sarpi neighborhood. I ask him how big this new platform is and thus, overcoming some initial hesitation, he explains that it is 20,000 m² that were purchased and completely refurbished by a consortium of Chinese businessmen who formed the Chinese company Ingrosso 1 in order to promote the relocation of Paolo Sarpi wholesalers in Lacchiarella. “So the Milanese government does not financially help this transfer?” I ask him, anxious to understand; and smiling, he answers me:

Nah, we did everything by ourselves, the company opened a loan with the bank, as they say ... Leasing! (Marco)

He told me, again, that all his colleagues who have moved away from Sarpi have done so in order to have better conditions for the practice of their daily trade activities: “Too far and too many restrictions; it was an obligation to move!” he emphasizes. Marco told me that some Chinese traders are coming right from the Sarpi neighborhood to Lacchiarella. While many of them still only have a retail store there, many simply closed their shops waiting to make a decision about the future. Marco is also

wondering about a possible conversion of his wholesale shop “Amici” into a retail one, although he has not yet decided which type of goods would be sold.

Immigration and Urban Politics in Milan

The urban regeneration process in the Paolo Sarpi neighborhood provides the macro-level context to study local policies about urban government and social mixes. An urban crisis may be considered a pivotal event, one able to put a problem into focus thanks to its evocative power. The problem may previously have been hidden, ignored, underestimated or neglected, and is now part of the political agenda. The main issue within the problem appears to be one of perception rather than of a concrete question of cohabitation. The issue of the Chinese becoming rooted and strengthening their visibility and dominating role in the area produces a defensive reaction on the part of the local population. As well as fearing that their neighborhood may “disappear,” the local Milanese feel that their real estate interests may suffer and their lifestyle may be under threat (Novak, 2002). But the great wall of Chinese discontent is also made up of the feelings of Italian citizens who feel betrayed and mocked by the municipality who, according to them, “has not been able to govern through the changes.” Via Paolo Sarpi is a social workshop in the heart of Milan, a micro-history allowing for a range of analytical frames, the first among which helps to understand the effects of the global economy, as Daniele Cologna explains²²

At present Chinese wholesalers are responding to the demand for goods on the part of Street-sellers, markets and immigrants in general. They have located their businesses where there is greater traffic, i.e. where is most convenient for them. Once again, we are before a global challenge, that of creating a commercial platform for the distribution of goods originating from China.

Most importantly, this case demonstrates that the problem of cohabitation in a socially mixed neighborhood is a problem of representation, which is essentially political.

Lanzani (2003) also highlights the far from marginal role that immigration plays within contexts of domestic transformation. If we dwell mainly on generative processes, on evolutionary patterns, and on the relations created within the geographical contexts hosting them, perhaps we are able to single out some rationale; I mean a range of evolutionary processes that appear more evident in their patterns during immigrants’

settling process that do, however, impact the city and the contemporary area. We can, in other words, think of immigration as an extremely sensitive tool able to identify emerging spatiality and new protocols in spatial organization rationale, singling out deep points of contact with some recent investigations on transformation taking place in the European arena.

Following the sociospatial perspective, my approach analyzes the real estate development as the “leading edge of changes in the metropolitan region,” considering more specifically that “politics to be highly linked to the concern of property development” (Gottdiener & Hutchinson, 2006, p. 77).

Whether we consider city or suburban governments, the central feature of the local state – its ability to acquire wealth and channel social resources – has meant that organized interests must compete with one another for control. This struggle for control over urban and suburban settlement space provides the drama of local politics. (*Ibid.*, p. 236)

The political process analyzed in the case study of Milan's Chinatown seems to operate as the “élite theory” of urban politics (Hunter, 1953; Stone, 1989). Moreover, this ethnographic research attempts to study how the mayor and city councilors of Milan made decisions on local political issues including social diversity and urban renewal. In fact, behind the local administration there is a select group of powerful and influential developers, or a “Milanese power structure,” that controls the city development toward its specific interests. However, there is another aspect that affects the question of power and control over urban space in the Milanese Chinatown case study. Residents and dealers organized associations and movements to influence the local government. The concept, developed by Castells on urban social movements, described as “urban-orientated mobilizations that influence structural social change and transform the urban meanings” (1983, p. 305), can be adapted to this study to explore how communities' associations (re)present *their* issues regarding *their* everyday lives in *their* neighborhood (Boyte, 1980; Logan & Rabrenovic, 1990) (Fig. 9).

These observations also suggest that there are many layers of the relationship between the way in which an urban space has been modified and the ways in which it is used. Regarding the Chinese presence in this Milanese neighborhood, these observations also suggest that “cultural habits leads immigrant to change the uses of existing spaces until they can create their own” (Krase, 1993, p. 54). The past decade of immigration has already had a major impact on Italian identity and this

can be seen in its streetscapes. This is true not only because of the numbers of newcomers but also because of their visual differences with indigenous Italians. These racial



Fig. 9. The Urban Conflict in Paolo Sarpi Street on April 12, 2007.

Source: Photo by Lidia K. C. Manzo.

(physical) and ethnic (cultural) differences in their local practices have produced an even greater change in the 'appearance' of some of Italy's well-known urban landscapes. (Krase, 2007, p. 102)

As noted by Colombo and Sciortino, there is a pattern to the spatial distribution of immigrants to Italian regions, which can be explained by "work opportunities, geographical proximity, national and local policies and, last but not least, networks" (2004b, p. 51).

Dealing with a Paradox: Urban Safety Policies Because of the Lack of Social Policies

The urban safety policies promoted by the Milan local government seem to be targeted toward a "problem" that sheds light on a lack of necessary social policies. Moreover, to analyze the evolution and recent trends of Italian immigration policy requires dealing with a paradox. Italian immigration has triggered more than a fair share of conflicts and controversies, as Colombo and Sciortino (2004a) argue that the attention of policy makers and the heat of public discussion have never been focused on the issue of managing the inflows of foreign workers, which has consequently been both consensually accepted and practically neglected.

Both the growth of the population and the densification of the urban centers imply many controversial issues related to the processes of social recomposition in urban portions of inner-city areas. This is an evident phenomenon in the Paolo Sarpi neighborhood, intensely affected by the gentrification process. The question of a difficult cohabitation between Italian residents and Chinese traders is not involved in urban policies, but is rather a situation that occurs when an emergency breaks out. The process of setting up of businesses run by Chinese entrepreneurs has created some time ago a path free of any form of regulation designed by the local government. Moreover, the question arrives at the public agenda due to the onset of urban conflict. The local government has only created temporary solutions, such as zoning, that restrict the passage road network in the neighborhood to residents only. No policy provision about a management of these businesses, in terms of trade types, urban spaces, and shop number to be assigned, was ever taken.

So, the space of the city is becoming more and more narrow. [Bricocoli and Savoldi \(2009\)](#) suggest that it is reducing the field in which a multiplicity of uses of space (place) and the presence of a variety of people (people) can be present. In fact, these urban “free” zones, in which “disorder” occurs, are used by the government as a place of decompression in the face of strong social pressure on immigration, precariousness, and insecurity. Here, we are talking about strategies aimed at places to act on people. Some types of instruments used to change those practices considered “improper” and to induce changes in the related social context are the case of zoning, the provisions relating to regulation of flow, and limiting traffic on wheels until the creation of pedestrian areas. As Bricocoli, de Leonardi, and Savoldi point out, “the exploration of urban transformations in Milano highlighted how both urban and social policies have been neglecting consideration for the intensive change that is occurring in the use of space in different urban areas. (...) It is within a discourse that is dominated by the frame of insecurities and in a context of overall simplification of the sense and conditions that can produce mixed environments, that ‘separation’ becomes a main principle in the spatial organization of the urban transformations” (2011, p. 7).

As [Monteleone and Manzo \(2010\)](#) explain, the minimalist government of the municipal administration had first rejected the application of the rules contained in the framework law of trade reform, renouncing the planning tools that would have regulated the distribution of businesses in the area. Instead, the local administration approved the residents’ requests and their aspirations for the “thousandth²³ government,” a kind of “home” regime

that was not the ideal resolution for such complex and delicate public controversies. The perspective of this minimal government lends itself to accommodate the “private interests” of the Italian residents elected as a point of reference (especially electoral) to whose “interested” attention is equally important. In a sense, the local administrators give up the role of mediation between conflicting interests that should characterize the specific political and democratic process, and indeed act as a “private” government that captures and brings “private” interests to the public sphere, justifying them as “public.”

The confusion between private and public interests, the overlap and the related nature of the “thousandth government” with the “minimal government,” and the combination of deregulation (*laissez faire*) and security intervention across territories and populations, are all seemingly contradictory aspects of neo-liberal ideas of politics. (2010, p. 161)

AN ETHNIC NEIGHBORHOOD IN TRANSITION: CONCLUSIONS

This empirical research was done to observe a process of urban transformation taking place as political and cultural gentrification of an urban context, while at the same time building the social construction of stereotypes and prejudice. At the beginning of this chapter, we discuss what and how the Chinese settlement on Sarpi Street has contributed to the preservation of the urban fabric of this neighborhood that is historically characterized by a mix of functions for housing, production, and sales.

The process of expulsion of the Chinese population justified precisely in the name of the ancient cultural heritage and of the recovery of the “Italian” identity neighborhood, would deny the substance of any part of the history of people and places who helped transform and create it, giving the city empty spaces, emptied of meaning. (Monteleone & Manzo, 2010, p. 161)

NOTES

1. *Source*: Associna, Association of the second-generation Chinese in Italy, <http://www.associna.com>.
2. A first attempt to reconstruct the origins of Chinese immigration to Europe from Zhejiang, comparing Chinese and European sources, is located in Thunø (1996). See also Pieke and Benton (1998).

3. For the concept of socioeconomic enclave applied to Chinese migration in an urban context area, see [Zhou \(1992\)](#).

4. An accurate historical reconstruction of the socioeconomic integration of Chinese immigrants in Milan was written by [Cologna \(1997a, 1997b, 2002a\)](#).

5. Brianza is a famous area in the north of Milan, in which people have a money-making attitude in the way they conduct business.

6. See the Johnson that describes the Chinese family as “a corporate entity in which its members cooperate to meet (economic) goals” (1993, p. 103).

7. Approximation based on data of the Registry Office of Milan City: from 8,656 residents in 2000, the Chinese population has grown to 18,946 in 2010.

8. The Ministero dell’Interno indicates the 30% as the average estimate of the percentage of undocumented immigrants in Italy, see [Ministero dell’Interno \(2007\)](#).

9. Gentrification and urban gentrification denote the sociocultural changes in an area where wealthier people buy housing property in a less prosperous community. As a consequence to gentrification, the average income increases and average family size decreases in the community. Ultimately, this may lead to informal economic eviction of lower-income residents, because of increased rent prices, house prices, and property taxes see [Smith \(1996\)](#).

10. Author’s translation.

11. Personal survey conducted between January and February 2009, two months after the municipality order of November 17, 2008, which limits car transit in via Paolo Sarpi.

12. Daniele Cologna is charter member of the Agenzia Codici, which conducted a survey in October 2007 on trade activities in Sarpi Neighborhood, under the supervision of doc. Alberto Demarchi.

13. Should be noted that the neighborhood is affected by tram infrastructure networks (on Montello Avenue and Bramante Street). Here we have the rails of the ATM tram (the municipal transport company) – line 3, 4, 12, and 14 – in addition to the passage of three different bus lines – number 43, 57, and 94.

14. Data provided by Vivisarpi – the residents’ association of the Sarpi neighborhood – and confirmed by Associna – the association of second-generation Chinese in Italy.

15. Obviously, Chinese retailers also have Italian customers, but this kind of selling is concentrated in electronic equipment, or media for data recording (CDs, DVDs, USB memories, etc.). These goods show significantly lower prices on the average than other shops in Milan [observations derived from field research].

16. *Source:* Vivisarpi, Association by the neighborhood committee, and Associna, Association of the Chinese second generation in Italy.

17. *Source:* “Chinatown – La “rivolta” dei migranti di successo.” Retrieved from <http://www.meltingpot.org>. Accessed on April 30, 2007.

18. Associna is a nonprofit association, formed by and to support second-generation Chinese in Italy.

19. FieraMilano City is the new large-scale exhibition center in the outskirts of Milan (Rho), where will be located the World Expo 2015.

20. “Cappelleria” is a shop that sells traditional hats, also handmade.

21. [Powell \(2010\)](#).

22. Source: “Chinatown, niente trasloco. Gli abitanti presi in giro” in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* on October 11, 2007.

23. The thousandth tables representing the house property shares in a building, expressed as the ratio between the value of each unit and the value of the building that equals to 1,000. Therefore, the thousandth table consists in a summary table, in which the proportional values of each individual unit are reported. These rates are important both to vote at the property meeting and the bill sharing.

24. The author has shot a documentary film, *VIA [da] PAOLO SARPI* (A-way from Paolo Sarpi) (an ethnographical reportage from the Milan’s Chinatown) – 49 minutes, colour, En subt.

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APPENDIX: DATA AND METHOD

The primary methods of data collection in this study are ethnographic observations and in-depth interview in the neighborhood. The use of multiple methods will facilitate the triangulation of the project's findings from a variety of vantage points (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2005). The knowledge of the ethnographic field was formed during these last 10 years, and gradually consolidated to become more and more in-depth. Some key events have led me to the final access to the field. In fact, since 2001 I have been worked for Milan and I helped perform the population and business census in that area. At that time I had a picture in my mind: the image of a complex, layered, and multifaceted urban scene. Over the years I attended this setting as an observer. I saw, over time, a lively, colored, and multicultural neighborhood with increased traffic generated by the Chinese wholesalers. I also saw insults, pushing, beatings, and protest marches during the first revolt of the Chinese community. It was the 12nd of April 2007. Since then I have never "abandoned" the field.

At the very beginning of the empirical research, I set as a first goal to deepen my references regarding the recent history of the district; in the meanwhile I was observing the urban space to gain a preliminary understanding of the dynamics that led to an event so disruptive of the social order. Moreover, because in that period I was working as a journalist in the press office of the City Hall, I was able to intercept some political designs about the redevelopment of the "Chinatown" area. The enviable vantage point as insider into the headquarters of the local Milanese government allowed me to establish profitable relationships with the secretaries of the mayor staff and its councilors. In fact, thanks to my colleagues, I had free access to interviews with politicians. Furthermore, in early 2008, taking part in a neighborhood visit organized by a local association and advertised in the Italian newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*, I built my first shy contacts with the gatekeepers of the neighborhood (more specifically, two local Italians and one local Chinese trader and members of the local dealers association – Ales – and the head of the association of young second-generation Chinese in Milan). Finally, in March 2008, I had my first official access to the field. I began building my network of contacts through these immediate gatekeepers, and through them I met residents and users from various parts of the neighborhood.

In all cases, I revealed my status as a researcher and explained to the residents that I was interested in studying the process of urban transformation. In addition to my face-to-face interactions with the Paolo Sarpi people,

I also regularly visited the online association blogs to observe the interactions among residents and dealers, and the types of issues that are discussed at the board.

Beyond the ethnographic observations, I interviewed 31 persons among residents and nonresidents who worked in the neighborhood, Chinese and Italian dealers, privileged witnesses, and local politicians. The interviewees were selected to represent the diversity of the community, racial or ethnic background, and occupation. The first fifth of the interviews were conducted in 2007, at the beginning of the research, and the remaining interviews were conducted in 2008. The interviews lasted on average of about 75 minutes, and they were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis.

During the observation and interviews, I took pictures of the most interesting aspects of the neighborhood, its edges, and defining characteristics. At the same time, I shot, sometimes with the help of a camera assistant, some preliminary movies. My approach to visual sociology does not consider the images in the marginal role as additional documents or pictures, but as a source of relevant data, and as a tool and part of the research process, by capturing the specificity and the evocative power of interpretation of the data. The social documentary,²⁴ which arose together with the MA thesis, in fact, provides a way for ethnographers to explore the cultural representations applied to the field of social research.